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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001442

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 7/28/2016

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT KARZAI WORRIES ABOUT RUSSIAN INTENTIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN

REF: A) DUSHANBE 1440 B) DUSHANBE 1434

DUSHANBE 00001442 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard E. Hoagland, Ambassador, Embassy
Dushanbe, State Department.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai invited the Ambassador for a private one-hour breakfast at the Presidential Guest House in Dushanbe before returning to Kabul July 28. After a 20-minute one-on-one, Karzai invited his foreign minister and two other advisers to join.

WHAT'S RUSSIA UP TO?

¶2. (C) Karzai asked how the United States was doing in Central Asia after losing the military base at Karshi Khanabad in Uzbekistan. The Ambassador replied that the situation is fluid and depends on the country, but the key trend worth watching is Russia's assertion that Central Asia is its own exclusive "sphere of influence" [REF A].

¶3. (C) Karzai said he, too, is increasingly worried about Russia, not only in Central Asia but also in Afghanistan. "Putin is pushing with venom and vigor." He recounted that when he was in Kazakhstan in July for an international conference, Russian President Putin had told him directly to pay more attention to the Tajiks from the Northern Alliance: "They're our guys." Karzai said he took that to mean senior Afghan Tajiks like the former defense and foreign ministers are Russia's agents of influence.

¶4. (C) Karzai recounted that the Russian Ambassador in Kabul frequently points out to him and his ministers collateral damage to civilians from U.S. and coalition military actions against Taliban elements and demands to know why Afghanistan doesn't

protest this more strongly in the name of human rights.

¶5. (C) Karzai added that he believes recent small explosions in Kabul are the work of "Russian friends" [Afghan Tajiks influenced by Russia] to destabilize his government. "If it had been Taliban or al-Qai'ida, the bombs would have been more effective."

¶6. (C) Karzai praised Tajikistan President Rahmonov for his unwavering support and his even-handedness with the Tajiks in Afghanistan. "In fact, when I discussed the Russia problem with him this time, he promised to try to help." Karzai mused that Rahmonov is the only Central Asian leader who respects Afghanistan's sovereignty and is willing to help enhance stability in Afghanistan.

FORMALITIES ONLY WITH AHMADINEJAD

¶7. (SBU) In response to a question, Karzai said he did not meet bilaterally in Dushanbe with Iranian President Ahmadinejad, and that the trilateral meeting had been brief and rather formal [REF B].

RAHMONOV: "SORRY YOU MISSED THE SAUNA"

¶8. (C) Karzai expressed surprise that President Rahmonov had spent the entire day, July 27, with him and his delegation. "Clearing his schedule like that was a true sign of friendship and hospitality, although we could have done without the hot-springs sauna."

¶9. (SBU) After the breakfast, the Ambassador's vehicle had to wait to exit the dacha compound because President Rahmonov had arrived to accompany Karzai to the airport. Rahmonov spotted the Ambassador 30 meters away and waved him over. Taking him by the hand, Rahmonov said, "We've never had a good photo of just you and me together," and he called over his photographers.

DUSHANBE 00001442 002.2 OF 002

¶10. (C) The Ambassador told Rahmonov, "You know that Karzai is a long-time personal friend of mine, but he's even a better friend of Tajikistan." Rahmonov squeezed the Ambassador's hand and said, "Thank God Karzai and the United States are in Kabul!"

¶11. (C) Rahmonov apologized for not inviting the Ambassador to join him and Karzai for the hot-springs sauna in the mountains. He said, "I really wanted to do it, just among friends, but realized 'some' would take it wrong." (COMMENT: We're relieved he thought twice. END COMMENT.)
HOAGLAND